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## **The Role of Strategic Management Practices on Growth of Private Universities in Kenya**

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### **Abstract:**

*This study examined the role of some underlying practices of strategic management and provides results of an empirically tested framework identifying the relationship between the practices and growth of private universities in Kenya. Informed by primary data collected from some selected private universities in Kenya and secondary data obtained from institutional documents the results indicated that the underlying strategic management practices had a strong combined effect on growth of private universities. While the details of every institution may not have been exhaustively covered in the study, key trends were substantially evoked. The study recommends that the university management should ensure that strategic management practices are embraced in the institutions by implementing strategies and aligning structures and cultures aimed at exploiting the immense opportunities for growth of the institutions. Further, the management should endeavour to embrace distributed and shared leadership that empowers various organs to adequately and freely execute their responsibilities; embrace product and service innovation as well as collaborative links with the industry and other external stakeholders keen in driving Research, Development and innovative activities while ensuring adherence to regulatory requirements.*

**Keywords:** *Strategic management practices, distributed leadership, strategic innovativeness, quality management practices*

### **1. Introduction**

Higher Education is globally accepted as a leading instrument for boosting productivity, competitiveness and economic growth (Bloom, Canning, & Chan, 2005). Universities and other higher education systems across the globe have increasingly taken leading roles in driving their states' economic development efforts becoming one of the fastest growing segments of the education sector. Over the past couple of decades, emergence of the knowledge – driven markets has given rise to new economic, social, political and cultural challenges to which nations, regions and higher education systems and institutions are responding (Santiago, Tremblay, Basri, & Arnal, 2008).

In Africa, universities have continued to play a pivotal role in the nations' socio-economic development and due to this realization, higher education in Africa has significantly expanded over the past years. An analysis of the role of Higher Education in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) shows that expanding Higher Education contributes to promoting faster technological catch-up, improving a countries ability to maximize output and decrease the knowledge gap (Bloom et.al., 2005). This expansion, mainly accompanied by diversification of providers, students, programmes, and changing modes of financing has resulted to a number of management challenges, calling for reforms and institutional restructuring to improve their operational efficiency (Varghese N. V., 2009). Higher Education in Kenya has similarly witnessed explosive progression unmatched in the African region besides that of the Republic of South Africa (Oanda, Chege, & Wesonga, 2008). This is largely attributed to the liberalization of higher education industry. Consequently, the universities landscape has become very competitive and turbulent than ever before (Mathooko & Ogutu, 2014). Concisely, Amini, Fremeley, & Wessler (2009) observe that the environment of the university has changed so dramatically that the university has no choice but to find adequate responses to such changes.

Like many organizations, survival, growth and prosperity of these universities depend on how well they respond to the changes taking place in the environment. Mathooko & Ogutu (2014) postulate that there has to be a deliberate and coordinated learning to a gradual systematic realignment between the environment and the organizations strategic orientation that results in improvement in performance, efficiency and effectiveness. It is noteworthy that in the current dynamic global environment, effective & innovative leadership and management are vital for running universities successfully. Successful Higher Education systems require successful and visionary higher education institutions that embrace dynamic and robust strategies resulting in sustainable institutional fitness and

survival (Varghese, 2004; Leibold, Probst, & Gibbert, 2005). This calls for adoption of new and dynamic strategic management premises for ecosystem success. Leibold et.al, (2005) further emphasize that ecosystems thinking require a grasp of the integrated whole of business within its environment, whose essential properties arise from the relationships among its parts.

A comparative study on Higher Education in Africa and United States done by Yizengaw (2008) observed that Higher Education with good governance and sound infrastructure is critical to economic success of any nation. Whereas, positioning of universities and other higher education institutions have been of interest to researchers (Varghese N. , Higher Education Reforms, 2004; Yizengaw, 2008; Mwiria, 2007) there is a clear dearth of literature on the role of actual practices such as governance, innovative leadership and management (Collis, 2004); (Waduge, 2011) as well as Quality Practices (Brucaj, 2013) on growth of universities.

### *1.1. Growth of Private Universities in Kenya*

The significance of Higher Education is paramount as knowledge increasingly plays a key role in fostering economic and social development (Bloom et.al. 2005; Argandona, 2015). The growth of private higher education is a global phenomenon. An international development climate promoting market oriented provision of education and other social services has been a catalyst for governments to promote and entrepreneurs to invest in private higher education (Munene, 2009). Driven in large measure by the growing demand for education and the inability of the public sector to handle the surge, these new institutions now serve nearly a third of all students in postsecondary education around the world (Kinser, 2010). In Africa, Varghese (2004) postulates that the market-friendly reforms and deregulation policies initiated under the structural adjustment programmes, the privatization of public sector units and encouragement of private sector in the context of globalization process, all created a stimulating environment for the emergence of private Higher Education sector. In the 1980's and before, expansion of Higher Education in Africa was possible only through the public universities (Munene, 2009). Presently, the landscape is fully transformed. Prior literature has similarly indicated growth of private universities in Africa (Thaver, 2008), Asia (Tursunkulova, 2005), Central and Eastern Europe (Levy, 2005) and Latin America (Bernasconi, 2003). Since independence, University education in Kenya has steadily witnessed explosive progression topping the list in the African region besides South Africa (Oanda, Chege, & Wesonga, 2008). With seventeen (17) chartered private universities, five (5) private university constituent colleges and thirteen (13) others operating with letters of interim authority, Kenya is noted to be one of the few countries where private universities have a longer history co-existing with public universities since the early 90s. In 1991, the World Bank prevailed upon the Government to restrict the growth of enrolment of public Universities to no more than three percent per annum up to the year 2017 (Varghese, 2004). This led to rapid emergence of private Universities in order to meet the social demand for education, and whose role today in supplementing government efforts in boosting the country's economy cannot be over emphasized. Currently, 53% of all the accredited universities in Kenya are private. This growth is currently fuelled by the universities Act 42 of 2012 which democratizes university Education. For the first time, both public and private universities are now governed by a single Law. The enactment of the Act ushered in a raft of changes in the management and operations of higher education in the country. The Act also provides the necessary institutional framework to safeguard quality and relevance of higher education in the country.

Notably though, as the number of universities surges upwards, so does the competition for market survival intensify (Kamau, 2013). Like every business globally, universities need to be ever more competitive, agile and rapid in responding and adapting to the market forces. Competition for survival has been the guiding force for existence and it has been associated with the creation of wealth (Varghese, 2004). Literature on the various competitive strategies that private universities adopt to gain a competitive advantage is quite immense (Kitoto, 2005); Kamau, 2013; Mathooko & Ogutu, 2014); however, implementation of the prescribed strategies notably varies with institutions, which is what makes them differ as far as performance and growth is concerned. Jowi (2003) points out key practices that are crucial in determining performance and growth of higher education institutions as leadership, management and governance. Mathooko & Ogutu (2014) also contend that distributed leadership and benchmarking on best management practices are critical in determining the growth of universities.

### *1.2. Statement of the Problem*

Private universities play a key complementary role in provision of knowledge and relevant skills which are critical in fostering sustainable economic and social development of a country (Varghese, 2004). The huge proliferation of the universities across the globe is therefore critical to propel nations towards becoming knowledge-based industrialized economies. However, despite the unprecedented boom in growth of higher education, private universities, like any other higher education institution face a number of challenges which deter their success (Mwiria et al., 2007; Onsongo, 2007; Varghese et al., 2004) and consequently fail to contribute towards fostering economic and social development of a country at large.

Jowi (2003) notes that the most salient trends and challenges facing private universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century include changing demands of the external and internal governance forces; globalization; necessity of responding to stakeholders diverse needs; rapid pace at which new knowledge is created and utilized; pressure to adapt to the new age of information and technology and phenomenal increase in the number of universities. The immense pressure at worst has led to closure of some universities due to low student enrolment and lack of sufficient funding to sustain their operations. Such dismal performance has previously been attributed to lack of strategic oversight and poor management practices (Mwalili, 2011; Jowi, 2003). While the rapid dynamism and changes in the environment are a major force to reckon, problems with growth and performance of universities have been closely linked with the way institutional strategic management practices are carried out (EUSUM, 2014). The long established view of strategic development and management in universities is reflected in Mintzberg & Rose (2003) which tracks the realized strategies of a prominent university

over a century, bringing forward that there was remarkable stability in the aggregate, however nothing revolutionary change in strategy ever occurred.

Researchers have previously identified different strategic management practices that could be linked with institutional performance. Bolden, Petrov, Gosling, & Bryman (2009) reported disparate governance mechanisms, increased focus on accountability as the key challenges facing the universities and which drive or curtail their growth. As a result, universities have to address quite diverse agenda apart from the traditional ones of teaching and research (Brujac, 2013). In a similar vein, Jowi (2003) observed that higher education institutions globally require reforms in their management and governance styles to address the key challenges currently faced. Amini, Fremeley and Wesseler (2009) argue that the cost of engaging in poor management practices in education institutions range from having disillusioned leadership which ultimately leads to reduced competitiveness and credibility of the institution. According to Yizengaw (2008), challenges hindering growth of the universities are exacerbated by weak leadership and governance. Strategic management practices, therefore, remain an issue of global significance which has attracted worldwide attention because of its apparent importance for strategic health and performance of both public and private sector organizations. While these previous studies add immense knowledge to existing literature, they also suggest a need to examine the practices in diverse contexts. In a comparative study of public universities in Kenya, Mathooko and Ogutu (2014) observed that to remain competitive, public universities embarked on three key practices: formulation of competitive strategies, emphasis on distributed leadership and benchmarking on the best practices locally as well as internationally. However, given that the private and public universities have different structures, it is recommended that a similar study be conducted in private universities.

It is worthwhile to note that strategic management does more than simply strategic planning as it stresses the dynamic and critical processes, those of leadership, which can bypass present strategies and innovatively design new ones (Tabatoni, Davies, & Barblan, 2002) and ensure that institutions provide valuable services to its clients and are able to not only survive but to thrive. Evidently then, very little exists in explaining the role of foregoing strategic management practices on growth of the private universities, particularly in the Kenyan context. It is against this background that this research was undertaken to address the gap and provide a better understanding through empirical evidence on the role of the underlying strategic management practices on growth of private universities in Kenya.

### 1.3. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to investigate the role of distributed leadership, strategic innovativeness and quality management practices on growth of private universities in Kenya.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Distributed Leadership Theory

Debate on leadership stretch back more than 50 years, and cover a well-trodden spectrum embracing “The Great Man Theory” at one end and travelling through Behavioral, Participative, Situational and Contingency theories into the Transactional and Transformational landscape where most can be found today, and from where the current development of “distributed leadership” stems (Collinson, 2011). Distributed leadership is considered under the umbrella of Strategic Leadership theories. According to Zoogah (2009), Strategic leadership integrates transactional, transformational, situational, and functional leadership behaviours. Research has identified antecedents (absorptive capacity, capacity to change, managerial wisdom (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001) and outcomes (learning, innovation, competitive advantage, and organizational effectiveness) of strategic leadership in traditional organizations and strategic alliances (Elenkov, Judge, & Wright, 2005; Zoogah, 2008). As such, it entails leadership that is broadly distributed, such that people within a team and organization lead each other (Jones, Applebee, Harvey, & Lefoe, 2010). It has frequently been compared to horizontal and collective leadership and is most contrasted with more traditional "vertical" or "hierarchical" leadership which resides predominantly with an individual instead of a group. In exploring some lessons from ‘The new leadership theory’, (James, 2011) contend that leadership needs to be understood in terms of leadership practices and organizational interventions; rather than just personal behavioral style or competence, the focus being on organizational relations, connectedness, interventions in the organizational systems and changing organizational practices and processes.

Woods, Bennett, Harvey and Wise (2004) view distributed leadership as an extension of collegiality often associated with academia that is characterised by three elements; concertive action, movable boundaries and a broader spread of expertise. Concertive action, they argue, is achieved by a process in which a group or networks of individuals interact in conjoint activity through the pooling and aggregation of individual initiative and expertise rather than by the linear addition of individual activity (Woods et al., 2004). Movable boundaries are achieved by the encompassing of a wider net of leaders than traditional approaches while the broader spread of expertise results from the inclusion of a variety of organizational expertise. This new leadership focus is therefore on dynamic, interactive processes of influence and learning informing on means of transforming organizational structures, norms and work practices (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Distinguishing between distributed and hierarchical forms of leadership, (Pirson & Turnbull, 2011) asserts that whereas hierarchical leadership ‘is dependent upon the wisdom of an individual leader, distributed leadership on the other hand draws from the knowledge of a collective. This is in line with Ensley *et al.*, (2006) view that while vertical leadership takes place through a top-down influence process, distributed leadership flows through a collaborative process’.

### 2.2. *The Resource Based View (RBV) Theory*

The pursuit of competitive advantage and superior performance is at the heart of much of strategic management literature (Barney J. B., 1997; Barney. J., 2001; Porter & Kramer, 2011; Porter M. , 2011; Raduan, Jegak, Haslinda, & Alimin, 2009). For over three decades now, there has been a resurgence of interest in the role of firm's resources as the foundation of a firm's strategy. The RBV stipulates that in strategic management, the fundamental sources and drivers to firm's superior performance are mainly associated with the attributes of their resources and capabilities which are valuable and inimitable (Barney J. , 1997, 2001; Helfat & Peteraf, 2003). Grant (1991) argues that the case for making the resources and capabilities of the firm the foundation for its long term strategy rests upon two reasons, one; resources and capabilities provide the basic direction for a firm's strategy and two; resources and capabilities are the primary source of profit for the firm. The RBV's central proposition is that if a firm is to achieve a state of sustainable performance, it must acquire and control valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources and capabilities. This proposition is shared by several related analyses; core competences (Hamel & Prahalad, 2013) dynamic capabilities (Helfat & Peteraf, 2003); (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997) and the knowledge-based view (KBV) (Grant, 1991). This study draws on the RBV theory to explain the innovative practices adopted by learning institutions to distinguish themselves from the masses and thereby drive better performance.

### 2.3. *Knowledge-based view (KBV)*

Closely related to the RBV is the knowledge-based approach which hinges on the fact that the reason why some firms ultimately succeed and others fail can be found in understanding their resources and capabilities and that a firm's resources and capabilities influence both the strategic choices that managers make and the implementation of those chosen strategies (DeNisi, Hitt, & Jackson, 2003). In this approach, knowledge and competencies are key to business competitiveness (Hitt *et al.*, 2001). Accordingly, organizations are conceived as repositories of knowledge (Spender, 2014). The organizational advantages of the business over market mechanisms arise from its ability to generate, apply and transfer knowledge (Kogut & Zander, 1992). Knowledge accumulation is possible through organizational learning which in turn is the impetus for the development and growth of the organization (Spender, 2014). Learning occurs as information is generated and exchanged between the business organization and its environment. This influence changes the range of the firm's potential behaviours' (Huber, 1991). Knowledge harvested from the environment is crucial to organizational learning, the development of the firm's competencies and its innovation process (Birkinshaw & Gupta, 2013; Hitt, 2013).

In many ways, innovation is the most important source of competitive advantage (Hill & Jones, 2009). This is because innovation can result in new products that better satisfy customer needs, can improve the quality (attributes) of existing products, or can reduce the costs of making products that customers want. The ability to develop innovative new products or processes gives a company a major competitive advantage that allows it to differentiate its products and charge a premium price and/or lower its cost structure below that of its rivals. This theory supplements the RBV theory in explaining the strategic innovative practices that universities globally can embrace.

### 2.4. *Quality Management Models*

Quality is a strategic factor that works through virtuous cycle to enhance a company's sustainable competitiveness, hence propagating superior institutional growth (Dale, Y.-Wu, Zairi, Williams, & Van der Wiele, 2001; Powell T. C., 1995; Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2004). Quality management in higher education is viewed in this study, as an institution's ability to create quality in its core business of teaching, research, learning and community engagement. To ensure long-term survival and success, Toombs *et al.*, (2009) notes that every organization should implement a quality initiative in conjunction with the use of various management models. Judgment of quality as postulated by Beckett and Brookes (2008) takes place against certain standards as thresholds. Determination of the extent to which the standards are met or exceeded is usually linked to expectations and needs of the customers.

#### 2.4.1. *Total Quality Management (TQM)*

As the title implies, TQM has the potential to encompass the quality perspectives of both external and internal stakeholders in an integrated manner (Sallis, 2014). It thereby enables a comprehensive approach to quality management that will assure quality as well as facilitate change and innovation. Beckett and Brookes (2008) posit that TQM is a comprehensive management approach which requires contribution from all participants in the organization to work towards long-term benefits for those involved and society as a whole.

#### 2.4.2. *5 P's Model*

The 5 P's model is an improvement of the strategic management model (Pryor & Toombs, 2004) which comprises of only one of five elements necessary for an organization to be successful - Purpose. The other four elements are Principles, Processes, People, and Performance and are depicted in Figure 1.

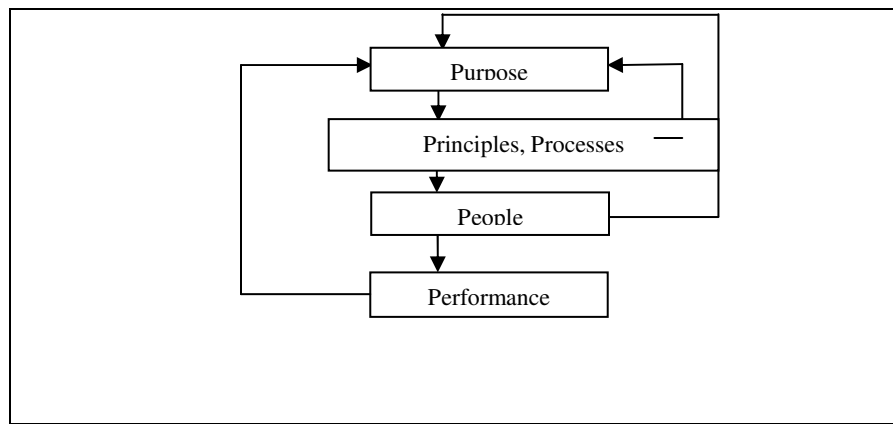


Figure 1: The 5 P's Model

Source: (Pryor M. , Toombs, Anderson, & White, 2010)

The arrows in Figure 1 depict the connection between strategy (Purpose) and structure (Principles as internal structures and Processes as external structures) and the influence of structures on employee behavior (People) and corresponding results (Performance). Strategy drives structure; structure drives behavior; and behavior drives results. The arrow from Performance to Purpose represents the feedback mechanism for guiding an organization toward its objectives. This feedback connection is essential to successful Strategic quality management. The primary motivation of the 5P's Model (an essential ingredient in Strategic quality management) is to guide an organization toward performance excellence, world-class status, and long-term survival. Metrics and measurements are vital to track status and gauge success & growth of an organization. However, as Owlia & Aspinwall (1997) notes, it is imperative to understand the context and the environment in which the variable being measured exists.

#### 2.4.3. International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9000 Series

ISO refers to an International standard for generic quality assurance systems (Bird, 2004) which is concerned with continuous improvement through preventative action (Beckett & Brookes, 2008). ISO 9000 series addresses various aspects of quality management and contains some of ISO's best known standards applicable to all institutional processes including educational institutions in pursuit of quality services to their clients (Bird, 2004). The standards provide guidance and tools for companies and organizations that wish to ensure that their products and services consistently meet customer's requirements, and that quality is consistently improved. The key elements of ISO are customer quality and regulatory requirements as well as efforts made to enhance customer satisfaction and achieve continuous improvement (ibid.).

Standards in the ISO 9000 family include: ISO 9001:2015 which sets out the requirements of a quality management system; ISO 9000:2015 which covers the basic concepts and language; ISO 9004:2009 which focuses on how to make a quality management system more efficient and effective as well as ISO 19011:2011 which sets out guidance on internal and external audits of quality management systems. Pryor et al ( 2010) observes that whereas ISO 9001:2000 is used when seeking to establish a management system that provides confidence in the conformance of organizations product to established or specified requirements, ISO 9004:2000 is used to extend the benefits obtained from ISO 9001:2000 to all parties that are interested in or affected by the business operations. There is general consensus among the proponents of quality management practices that a key imperative of using the above discussed models is the requirement for HEIs to adopt a strategic approach to quality measurement and management, and to engage in self-assessment against predetermined criteria (Cullen et al., 2003; Roberts and Tennant, 2003).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Philosophy

This study was guided by the philosophy of logical positivism which adheres to the view that only factual knowledge is trustworthy (Creswell J. , 2013). According to the philosophy, information derived from experience, interpreted through reason and logic forms exclusive source of all authoritative knowledge (Babbie, 2007). Methods associated with this paradigm include surveys where though qualitative methods can be used, quantitative methods tend to be predominant . . ." (Mertens, 2005, p. 12). Expansive literature indicates that as a philosophy, positivism is in accordance with the empiricist view that knowledge stems from human experience (Creswell & Clark, 2011) where the researcher is concerned with gaining knowledge in a world which is objective using scientific methods of enquiry such as surveys.

#### 3.2. Research Design

According to Cooper & Schindler (2011), research design is a strategy for a study and the plan by which the strategy is to be carried out. It specifies the methods and procedures for collection, measurement and analysis of data. Similarly, Kumar (2005) views research design as a plan, structure or strategy of investigation, or the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data. Research design is therefore a 'master plan' within which a research is undertaken.

This study employed mixed method design, a philosophical assumption that involves integrating both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The central premise is that the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone (Creswell J. , 2013) and also allows for cross validation of relationships discovered between the variables (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

### 3.3. Target Population

The study targeted the 36 private universities in Kenya as provided by the Commission for University Education (CUE, 2016) during the time of data collection. The Universities were divided into three groups/strata based on the institutions year of establishment as indicated in Table 1.

### 3.4. Sample and Sampling Technique

A data base of all private universities which were operational by the year 2015 was compiled. The data base contained the name of the university, the year of establishment (awarded LIA), as well as the year chartered. The information was obtained through web based inquiry from the official website of Commission for University Education. The sample size was determined through proportionate stratified random sampling method, where universities were classified into three strata based on their year of establishment. A sampling fraction of 1/4 was used to determine the proportion of the population to be included in the sample. This was important as it provided room for adequate representation of universities. The questionnaires were then distributed to the senate members of the 8 (eight) sampled universities.

	Stratum	Population Size	Sampling Fraction	Sample Size
A.	1983 – 1993	5	0.25	1
B.	1994 – 2004	9	0.25	2
C.	2005 – 2015	22	0.25	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>		<b>8</b>

Table 1: Sampling Frame and Sample Size

### 3.5. Data Collection Methods

This research collected both primary and secondary data. Primary data are sought for their proximity to the truth and control over error Cooper & Schindler (2011) and bridges the research gaps in the literature reviewed. Respondents comprised of 120 senior staff who served as Senate members in their respective institutions. Secondary data was also obtained from the respective universities websites and existing records as well as from Commission for University Education records and website.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Response Rate

The study sampled 120 senate members of the respective universities and a total of 120 questionnaires were distributed. 91 questionnaires were filled and returned, however, 3 were rendered unusable since most of the items were left un - answered. In the final analysis, 88 questionnaires in total were used, giving a 70 % rate of usable responses which according to Babbie (2007) is sufficient to make inferences on the study population

Number of Questionnaires distributed	120
Number of Questionnaires returned	91
Number of Questionnaires returned but not usable	3
Number of Returned and Usable questionnaires	88
% Response rate	<b>70</b>

Table 2: Response Rate

### 4.2. Respondents' Profile

Majority (63%) of the members were between 36 and 50 years while 37% were aged 50 years old and above. 62.5% of the senators were male while 37.5% were female implying that despite the efforts to ensure gender equity, the senate was seemingly dominated by men. Majority of the respondents 69% male and 63% female had a PhD degree a clear indication that the institutions were keen to have an academically strong team in the senate. The findings further indicated that majority (65%) of the sampled senate members had served in the senate for 3 to 8 years. 42.2% had served for between 6 to 8 years while 8% have served for more than 8 years. The lowest proportion (3%) had served for utmost 2 years. Though sampling was stratified random 66.67% of those sampled were established by a religious body while 33.33% were established either by a corporate, individual or affiliation with a local or foreign university. This is a true reflection of the entire private universities population in the country and which influences the nature of leadership in the respective universities.

### 4.3. Descriptive Statistics Findings and Discussions

#### 4.3.1. Distributed Leadership

The study revealed that an overwhelming majority (77.8%) of the respondents considered their supervisor to often act as a spokesperson of the group and clearly articulated what was expected of those being led as indicated by 51.1% of the respondents. 74.6% of the senate members opined that their leaders were patient and took time to understand a situation before making a decision. A significant response of 46% however, opined that their leader only lets them know what is expected of them occasionally. The respondents indicated moderate levels of engagement in decision making as expressed by 56.7% who opined that as senate members, they were given moderate space to think and act independently and quite often encouraged use of uniform procedures. It is clear from the findings that the senate members did not generally experience distributed leadership to large extent, implying that distributed leadership as a strategic management practice has not been totally embraced in the universities.

The findings are consistent with Gosling, Bolden and Petrov (2009) findings on distributed Leadership in Higher Education who indicated that majority of university leaders experienced conflicts in the identity-work of being an academic and a manager and rarely managed to embrace distributed leadership which negatively affected the institutional performance as they failed to support a shared understanding of responsibilities. Drew (2010) in exploring issues and challenges in Higher Education Leadership similarly observed that the most significant challenges centred around the need for distributed leadership, flexibility, creativity and change-capability; responding to competing tensions and remaining relevant; maintaining academic quality; and managing fiscal and people resources which then hindered effective strategic leadership. These expectations extend across the globe and private universities in Kenya need to adapt distributed leadership if they are to competitively engage in the global front.

#### 4.3.2. Strategic Innovativeness

The findings revealed that majority of the institutions moderately embraced product and service innovation as indicated by 31.1% of the senate members. 50.5% of the respondents indicated that their institutions considered industry needs in determining the programmes to offer though sharing acquiring external knowledge while 35.6% indicated that the institutions moderately reviewed their curricula to keep up to date with the market dynamism. 63.7% of the respondents pointed out that the institutions had collaborative links with the industry and other external stakeholders who keen in driving Research and Development and innovative activities while 26.7 % indicated that the institutions were not doing enough to foster collaborations. Only 53.4% of the institutions with 15.5% indicating that their institutions did very little to mentor and instil innovative ideas. 30.5% indicated that their institutions moderately took advantage of the massive data available from online sources to drive innovation, productivity and growth while 52.7% indicated that their institutions kept up to date and made use of the massive online data to drive innovativeness. This was corroborated by the verbal comments from the respondents that the universities made efforts to continuously and proactively develop themselves in new directions to ensure that they remained relevant, contributing to national development and ensuring global competitiveness through collaborative research and innovation. The study findings are consistent with Zhou and Uhlaner (2009) who indicated that institutions globally are bound to benefit in the longterm if they enhance their collaborative efforts, embrace technology and innovation and leverage from knowledge sharing – especially external knowledge acquisition. Zhou and Uhlaner however noted that concentration by institutions on internal knowledge sharing as evidenced by most of the institutions limits innovativeness and hence growth. The results are also in line with Strukelj (2011) who examined innovativeness as a strategic management practice in Slovenia. The researcher recommended that institutions should take an explicit innovative action around their policies and consequently their way of management to drive competitiveness, relevance and growth.

#### 4.3.3. Quality Management Practices

57.8% of the respondents opined that their institutions largely focused on customer satisfaction while in the extreme 25.7 % felt that their respective institutions had a little focus on their customers while 16.4% indicated that the universities hardly focused on their customers. Similarly, 60.3% while opined that their respective universities' focused on market needs and ensured alignment with the market demands. The findings were in agreement with Al-Amri, (2012) in a study on equality management practices in universities in Jordan. Al-Amri concluded that universities market focused quality initiatives are the most powerful competitive tool that shape marketing, business strategy and affords an organization an unmatched competitive advantage.

The researcher established that majority of the universities adhered to regulatory requirements for instance ISO 9001:2008 as indicated by a large proportion (70.9%). 48.3% indicated that Internal reporting and improvement plans in their universities were open, transparent, focused and supportive of continuous improvement. 62.4% of the respondents stated that their universities implemented effective performance management system. From the results, 21% of the senate members opined that their universities Institution's Governance, management and quality assurance systems were sufficient to manage academic activities and respond to development and change. 56.4% of the respondents opined that their institutions academic leadership provided strong and sustainable basis for academic activities to grow in and an environment conducive. 40% opined that to a moderate extent their respective institutions had supportive feedback mechanism for receiving, processing and responding to the reviews coming back from a range of stakeholders. This according to (Brucaj, 2013) is a critical evidence of embracing quality management practice. The conclusion was also in line with Saylor (1996) opinion that a quality management model should be based on the concept of strategic standardization and continuous improvement the result of which unmatched competitive advantage.

#### 4.4. Growth of Private Universities

The study considered global ranking, student enrolment and proportion of international students, as the indicators for the growth of private universities. While the researcher is cognizant of the various indicators that are used in ranking of the universities, research output, Innovativeness, collaborations and revenue diversification were specifically considered to in this study.

##### 4.4.1. Universities Global Ranking

Majority (75.3%) of the respondents were to a great extent of the opinion that their institutions embraced innovative and technologically driven teaching methods while 20.5% felt that the efforts were just moderate, hence the universities needed to do more to drive innovativeness. An overwhelming majority (40.9%) however were of the opinion that though research grants are critical in driving the research agenda of the universities the universities only moderately embraced the parameter. 17.8% of the respondents indicated that the universities did very little to encourage publications by staff and students which could explain the reason for reduced funding efforts as they are intertwined. However, 50.1% of the respondents were in agreement that the universities made commendable efforts to enhance student – lecturer ratio which further enhanced the learning process. 29.4% of the respondents indicated that their universities did little to enhance digital access of materials and this could be explained by the relatively low pace of the universities adoption of more technologically driven systems. The findings are in agreement with Gudo, Oada and Olel (2011) and Brujac (2013) whose studies recommended that universities top leadership should ensure that their institutions embrace the rapid technological advancement in discharging their multiple mandates of teaching, research and community engagement in their pursuit of sustainable competitiveness and growth.

##### 4.4.2. Student Enrolment

20% of the institutions had less than 1000 students, 36% had between 1000 and 3000 students, 29 % had between 3001 and 5000 while 15% had over 5000 students. Despite the increased effort by the universities to enhance enrolment levels, the increased number of private universities as well as the module 11 of the public universities largely contributes to the relatively low enrolments in the universities especially the more recently established institutions as observed by Mathooko and Ogotu (2014).

##### 4.4.3. Presence of International Students

As a determinant of universities growth globally, the researcher sought to establish the relative population of international students enrolled in the sampled universities. The response from the members of senate were categorized into percentage proportions of 0 – 10, 11 – 20, 21 – 30 and above 30. 41.1% of the respondents indicated that of the total student population, their institutions had between 11 – 20 % international students, 31.1% of the respondents indicated that their institutions had less than 10% international students while 17.8% had the proportion of the international students to the entire students' population as greater than 30%. Despite being low, the percentages were quite significant for the Kenyan education sector seeing that majority of the institutions are now making every effort to attract international students. The findings confirm previous study by Bolden *et al.* (2008) that one of the key transition universities are undergoing globally is increased internationalization which has largely been facilitated by the openness of the world and is considered as a key driver of institutional growth. The findings are also in line with Magutu, et al., (2010) observation that majority of universities in Kenya are yet to achieve a 30% international students presence which would impact have a more impactful global presence as recommended by Amini, Fremeley and Wessler (2009).

##### 4.4.5. Diagnostic Tests for Study Variables

The study applied The Kolmogorov Smirnov test to check the normality of the entire data set, which then informed further stages of statistical analysis. At 5% significance level the results of the normality test are indicated in Tables 3, 4 & 5.

	<b>Distributed Leadership</b>	
Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>	N	88
	Mean	3.93
	Standard Deviation	0.654
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	0.296
	Positive	0.282
	Negative	-0.296
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.987
<i>p</i> -Value		0.001

Table 3: Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test Results for the Distributed Leadership

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z-value for distributed leadership was 1.987 with a *p*-value of 0.001 < 0.05 signifying that distributed leadership data was normally distributed. The data could therefore be subjected to further statistical analysis.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z-value for Strategic Innovativeness was 2.187 with a *p*-value of 0.000 < 0.05 as indicated in Table 18 which signifies that the data collected was normally distributed indicating its suitability for further statistical analysis.



		<b>Strategic Innovativeness</b>
Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>	N	88
	Mean	3.91
	Standard Deviation	0.733
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	0.326
	Positive	0.274
	Negative	-0.326
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		2.187
<b>p-Value</b>		0.000

Table 4: Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test Results for the Strategic Innovativeness

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z-value for Total Quality Management was 2.364 with a *p*-value of 0.000 < 0.05 which signifies that the data on Total Quality Management was normally distributed hence could be subjected to further statistical analysis.

		<b>Total Quality Management</b>
Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>	N	88
	Mean	4.02
	Standard Deviation	0.621
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	0.352
	Positive	0.336
	Negative	-0.352
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		2.364
<b>p-Value</b>		0.000

Table 5: Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test Results for the Quality Initiatives

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z-value for university growth was 2.823 with a *p*-value of 0.000 < 0.05 which signifies that the variable's data was normally distributed. Hence, could be subjected to further analysis.

		<b>Growth</b>
Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>	N	88
	Mean	3.9773
	Standard Deviation	0.69846
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	0.263
	Positive	0.26
	Negative	-0.263
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.744
<b>p-Value</b>		0.005

Table 6: Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test Results for the Growth of Universities

#### 4.6. Inferential Statistics Findings and Discussions

The correlation analysis results of the relationship between Distributed Leadership and Growth of Private Universities, yielded a coefficient of  $r(88)=0.702$ ,  $p=0.00<0.05$  while the multiple regression results recorded a coefficient of regression was  $\beta_2=0.278$ ,  $p=0.036<0.05$  implying strong positive relationship between the two variables that was significant at 5%. This informed the rejection of the null hypothesis hence acceptance of the alternative hypothesis that 'Distributed leadership has a significant role on growth of private universities in Kenya'. Based on the results, Collective distribution, intuitive working relationships and collaborated distribution had a positive and linear relationship on the various measures of growth in private universities. The conclusion supports existing literature by Ball (2007) who describes leadership as a key issue for higher education institutions and one that is increasingly regarded as beneficial to improved performance across all activities in institutions.

The relationship between Strategic Innovativeness and Growth of Private Universities was tested using a Karl Pearson correlation that yielded  $r(88) = 0.804$ ,  $p=0.00<0.05$  implying existence of strong positive relationship between the variables. A confirmatory statistical test by regression analysis yielded a coefficient of  $\beta_3=0.364$ ,  $p=0.040<0.05$  implying that the variable had a significant positive influence on Growth of Private Universities at 5% levels of significance. The findings informed the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis and conclusion that 'Strategic Innovativeness has a significant role on growth of private universities in Kenya'. The findings indicated that vision innovation, product innovation and product delivery innovation all had a positive and strong linear relationship with private universities growth. The finding on strategic innovativeness agrees with Hamel & Prahalad (2013) who advocate for strategic innovativeness that entails consideration by strategic managers for both strategies for the future as well as for the present in order to stay successful over time focusing on both operational effectiveness and differentiation. The study findings further advocate for creative thinking that is different from conventional thinking so as to ensure competitiveness and growth.

The relationship between quality management practices and growth of private universities was confirmed by the resultant coefficient of correlation of  $r(88) = 0.769$ ,  $p-value=0.00<0.05$ . The coefficient of regression for Quality Initiatives (Strategic Standardization and

Continuous Improvement) was  $\beta_4=0.317$ ,  $p=0.014<0.05$  implying that the aforementioned Quality practices had a positive influence on the Growth of Private Universities that was significant at 5%. This informed the acceptance of alternative hypothesis and conclusion that Quality Initiatives had a significant role on growth of private universities in Kenya. The findings concur with Dale et al., (2001) observation that quality service is key for success, as well as the most powerful competitive tool currently reshaping marketing and business strategy and more so for the university sector which is now part of the global and extremely competitive market.

### 5. Conclusion & Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the growth of private universities hinges on three key Strategic Management practices – Distributed leadership, Strategic Innovativeness and Quality Management practices. The study variables converged to the hypothesized model and in concurrence with European Observatory on good practices in Strategic University Management (EUSUM, 2014) which underscored the need for the university managers to strive towards shared leadership, decentralized initiatives, innovation, exchange of information, and network activity, with a constant concern for quality and the widest possible propagation of evaluation methods and quality standards. Therefore, though the stated practices were largely informed by literature and theoretical contexts from developed countries, the practices are readily applicable in the Kenyan context. The solutions proposed are an important theoretical advancement of the ongoing discussion on enhancing university management to drive institutional growth.

As an organ responsible for advising the council, the senate of a university is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and comprises of senior academic and professional officers who provide overall co-ordination and management of the University (CUE, 2016). As obtained from respective Charters of the sampled universities and as a requirement of the Universities Act of No. 42 of 2012, senate members take key executive decisions, ensuring that the institution operates efficiently and effectively, and supplies the Council and its committees with executive reports, draft budgets and accounts, key performance indicators, benchmarking information on capital investment and reports on risk management. As observed from the hypothesized model, the senate thus has a critical role to play in steering institutions growth through embracing distributed leadership and engendering strategic innovativeness and Quality management practices and initiatives in all the undertakings, processes and activities of the universities.

### 6. Suggestions for Further Study

While this study focused on only three strategic management practices, it is important to explore other possible underlying practices that could have an influence on the growth of private universities. Secondly, the results of this study were only drawn from the private university sector in Kenya. It is acknowledged that differences among sectors may impact upon the results, but these are beyond the scope of this research and hence could be addressed by further research. A comparative study should be conducted so as to establish similarities and differences in the way private and public universities are governed and managed. There is also need to conduct benchmarking studies to derive best practices that should be embraced by universities especially given the dynamism and vibrancy of the sector.

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